



Patriarchal Bargaining Strategies in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*

by Lola Shoneyin

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-05-22 Revised: 2026-05-29 Accepted: 2026-06-23 Keywords: domestic power; patriarchal bargain; polygamy; subordination; women's agency DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10748 Corresponding Author: Lorencia Sariani Tondang lorentondang@students.unnes.ac.id Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Semarang	<i>This research examines the mechanisms of the patriarchal bargain within a polygamous household through a textual analysis of Lola Shoneyin's novel <i>The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives</i>. Employing Deniz Kandiyoti's framework of the "patriarchal bargain," this study aims to analyze how the absolute authority of the male head is maintained and subsequently negotiated by his four wives. The research utilizes a descriptive qualitative method with a systematic close reading approach. The findings indicate that the patriarchal system in Baba Segi's household operates through a rigid "rule of the game" that reduces a woman's worth entirely to her reproductive function. This system strips childless women of their personal identity, comfort, and verbal rights. To survive these concrete constraints, the wives deploy bargaining strategies. First, the three senior wives, namely Iya Segi, Iya Tope, and Iya Femi, execute a Reproductive Strategy. They perform exaggerated domestic submission and flattery to mask their deliberate biological sabotage, secretly conceiving children with other men to secure material safety and social prestige. Second, the educated fourth wife, Bolanle, deploys an Intellectual Resistance Strategy. Utilizing her higher education and critical reasoning, Bolanle rejects traditional, irrational solutions and shifts the domestic battleground to a modern medical institution. Under the authority of science, she successfully exposes the husband's infertility, thereby dismantling the false premise of absolute male supremacy. This research concludes that the characters in the novel are strategic actors who actively exploit the blind spots of patriarchal power.</i>

The patriarchal bargain does not merely limit women's options, but also provides distinct avenues for active subversion, proving that women will systematically leverage their specific modalities whether interpersonal deceit or intellectual capacity to destabilize masculine dominance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Patriarchy, Polygamy, and the Nigerian Context

Patriarchy remains a deeply rooted cultural issue, internalized through processes of socialization and resocialization that maintain control over women (Khalid, Nadeem, Aslam, & Afzal, 2025; Ume Habiba, Rabia Ali, & Asia Ashfaq, 2016). In every society, there are certain norms and values that govern how individuals should act and think in accordance with their perceptions of what is considered male or female (Khalid et al., 2025).

This system operates through intersecting power relations that interact with other forms of social authority, meaning that patriarchy cannot be separated from the broader social context in which it exists. The exercise of patriarchal power is a means of claiming authority over biological aspects, over the human body itself (Pierik, 2022). Patriarchy also functions as a system of male authority that maintains male dominance through various social, political, and economic institutions (Oladimeji, 2024).

Patriarchy is one of the barriers to women's advancement in society, as it grants absolute power to men and places women as a whole in a subordinate position (Ade, 2021). In the Nigerian social context, patriarchal structures are closely linked to traditional family practices, including polygamy (Ezeanya, Patrick, & Emerson, 2022). There is a strong emphasis on having children as a marker of social status and male masculinity (Mensah, 2023).

1.2 The Novel and Structural Oppression

The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives by Shoneyin, 2010, captures these dynamics through the life of a polygamous household led by Baba Segi, a domineering man. However, the manifestation of patriarchal power within such a household is not merely a unidirectional force of absolute silencing. While the overarching structure remains oppressive, the domestic sphere functions as a site where power is not only exercised by men but also subtly negotiated by women.

This suggests that even within highly restrictive environments, women are not static victims; they operate as active agents who navigate their subordination to reclaim a degree of influence over their own lives (Mohajan, 2022). Patriarchal power is often a complex interaction where the dominated party finds ways to maneuver within the system's constraints to ensure their own welfare (Hickey & Nazneen, 2019).

The household consists of four wives with starkly contrasting backgrounds: the ambitious first wife, Iya Segi; the passive Iya Tope; the manipulative Iya Femi; and the fourth wife, Bolanle, who is initially marginalized due to her perceived infertility. Bolanle's presence disrupts the long-established balance of power among the three senior wives.

Through these interactions, Shoneyin illustrates how the patriarchy of a polygamous household creates a space where patriarchal power is produced, maintained, and contested (Nguwasen & Onyemelukwe, 2022). From a sociological perspective, "marriage as a social institution should be a union of love and interdependence between spouses" (Emelone, 2020). However, within Baba Segi's household, this ideal is overshadowed by a rigid hierarchical structure where marital dynamics are defined by competition and subordination rather than genuine partnership.

1.3 Patriarchal Bargain Theory

The reality within Baba Segi's household reveals that patriarchy does not function solely as a one-sided, oppressive force. A dynamic emerges that Kandiyoti terms the patriarchal bargain, in which the wives consciously navigate within the system's constraints through distinct and contrasting modalities (Wijetunge, 2024). This operational dynamic reinforces the notion that the "legitimacy of women existences captured diverse and compound through the lens of cultural and social background" (Luthfia, Juliasih, Saktiningrum, 2023).

While the three uneducated senior wives exploit the patriarchal "rules of the game" through performative compliance, Bolanle, who possesses high intellectual capital as a university graduate, introduces a different paradigm (Benedikta & Riyanto, 2022). This dynamic reveals a deeper complexity of female agency; instead of adapting to traditional scripts, an educated woman leverages her intellectual and rational capacity to challenge, rather than sustain, patriarchal delusions.

1.4 Previous Studies and Research Gap

Previous studies of this novel have explored various dimensions of power. The first study was a critical discourse analysis titled "Critical Discourse Analysis of the Notions of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*" by Blessing Titilayo Inya, 2020. In this study, the researcher examined the concepts of matriarchy and patriarchy within the novel. The findings indicate that men are positioned as dominant figures who seek to control women and reject any challenges to their authority, while women are portrayed as agents struggling against male domination, competing with other women who both support and threaten their positions in the domestic sphere.

Furthermore, the researcher discusses the ideological implications depicted in the novel, where male dominance is normalized to the point where women are often overlooked, while female dominance over other women remains unquestioned. Even the resistance women offer against men often faces opposition from the wider community.

The second study, titled “Challenging Patriarchy: Feminism and Gender Dynamics in Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* (2010)” by Aridj, 2023, explores gender dynamics from a feminist perspective. The researcher aims to deconstruct and examine representations of gender roles and patriarchal norms in the context of contemporary Nigeria. The findings reveal that the women in the novel experience oppression within a polygamous system where wives live under their husbands’ control.

They face complex pressures, limitations, and inequalities perpetuated within the household. As the husband and a representation of the patriarchal system, Baba Segi demonstrates male power over the family. The relationships and control he exercises reflect a system of domination in which the wives have no voice to pursue alternative choices. Furthermore, the patriarchy in this novel is not presented as the work of a single individual; the other wives also reinforce male dominance to maintain their positions within the household. They create a hostile environment characterized by mutual sabotage and competition to prove which among them is the most superior and deserving.

The third study is a journal article titled “Narratives of Identity, Power, and Gender: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives* by Lola Shoneyin” by Dr. Nazia Anwar, Dr. Saima Jamshaid, 2024. In this study, the researchers examine how discourses on gender, identity, and power are constructed, as well as how women struggle to survive. The findings indicate that Baba Segi’s dominance in the novel succeeds because it operates within a traditional framework, leveraging his wealth and perceptions of his masculinity. Furthermore, this dominance is directed at women who are fundamentally powerless, characterized by a lack of education, infertility, and a lack of awareness regarding their situation.

The discursive negotiations identified by previous researchers reveal the diversity of women’s identities and demonstrate women’s resilience against patriarchal control. However, their findings primarily characterize patriarchal dominance as a force that either targets women who are ‘fundamentally powerless’ due to a lack of education, or assumes that all women within the domestic sphere must rely on the same traditional scripts to survive.

This creates a significant conceptual gap, as previous studies do not fully account for how different social modalities—specifically the possession of higher education—inflect and alter the direction of a patriarchal bargain. Consequently, this study offers a different perspective by arguing that women’s bargaining strategies under rigid patriarchy are multi-directional. This research identifies a ‘gap’ by demonstrating that an educated character like Bolanle does not engage in submissive manipulation like her senior peers; instead, she deploys an intellectual and medical resistance strategy that actively dismantles the patriarchal structure from within.

By introducing the patriarchal bargain perspective to examine character dynamics in literary narratives centered on polygamy, this study contributes to a better understanding of how women's survival and resistance strategies emerge within oppressive structures. Analyzing this novel through Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of the patriarchal bargain is crucial, as it illustrates that women are not merely passive victims, but rather strategic actors capable of devising diverse methods, ranging from interpersonal manipulation to empirical resistance, within a set of concrete constraints to maximize their security or reclaim their autonomy (Kandiyoti, 1988). Therefore, this study seeks to answer how the mechanism of the patriarchal bargain operates within Baba Segi's household.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Framework

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to provide a comprehensive analysis of women's agency and strategic decision-making in the domestic sphere. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018), qualitative research is used to understand the meanings that individuals or groups construct regarding a social or humanitarian issue. In this study, this approach was chosen to explore the complex power relations and gender dynamics represented in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin. This study relies on in-depth interpretation of textual elements and character motivations rather than statistical or numerical data.

This study focuses on the dynamics of the patriarchal bargain within Baba Segi's household, where the patriarchal system not only operates in an oppressive manner but is also actively negotiated by his four wives in order to ensure their safety and survival. Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) theory stands out as the theoretical framework explaining how women negotiate within an oppressive system. Kandiyoti argues that women are not merely passive victims, but strategic actors who employ various forms of resistance to maximize their security. This framework is used to provide a structured interpretation of the wives' struggles, illustrating how their choices align with the model of the patriarchal bargain.

The data for this study consists of narrative segments and dialogues from the novel, collected through a systematic process of close reading and textual analysis. Key sections of the novel were carefully examined to identify, classify, and inventory related to the concept of patriarchal bargaining. Data collection focused on internal monologues, dialogues, and narrative descriptions that reveal how wives negotiate their positions and life choices, particularly in response to pressures within polygamous households.

2.2 Data Coding and Systematic Analysis Procedures

The primary data source is the novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin. As secondary data sources, this study draws on relevant academic articles, journals, and theoretical works that provide context regarding the dynamics of patriarchy. To analyze the collected data, this study follows a systematic textual analysis based on Kandiyoti's framework. First, the analysis identifies the specific forms of patriarchy and the domestic "rules of the game" established within Baba Segi's household. Second, it examines how these rigid rules restrict and shape the lives of women. Finally, evaluating the outcomes of these bargains, including the emotional costs and structural disruptions they cause.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 The Portrayal of Patriarchal System in Baba Segi's Household

In Lola Shoneyin's novel *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the patriarchal system manifests as a structure of absolute power that places men at the center of sole authority, while women are positioned within a subordinate domestic sphere. As the head of the family, Baba Segi exercises complete control over the lives of his four wives, namely Iya Segi, Iya Tope, Iya Femi, and Bolanle, through a combination of economic dominance and absolute control over women's reproductive functions.

This polygamous household operates as an institution where a woman's worth is measured not by her intellectual capacity or character, but by the extent to which her body can be utilized to validate the male ego. Within the framework of Patriarchal Bargaining, Deniz Kandiyoti highlights the concept of the "rules of the game," in which different forms of patriarchy dictate distinct regulations for women. These rules demand diverse strategies from women to optimize their life options, whether through active or passive resistance in the face of oppression (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274).

In Baba Segi's household, the prevailing "rules of the game" dictate that a woman must provide offspring if she wishes to have her existence acknowledged within the family. This patriarchal objectification of the female body, which reduces women to mere reproductive commodities, is illustrated by Shoneyin through the narrative used by Baba Segi when he discovers that his fourth wife, Bolanle, has not conceived:

"He knew it was time to do something drastic about his fourth wife's childlessness. If a man has a well, he expects to draw water from it; he does not expect to peer into the bucket and see his own face staring back at him." (Shoneyin, p. 8).

Through this "well" analogy, Shoneyin confirms that the rules created by Baba Segi view a woman's womb merely as a natural resource bought to be drained for the owner's satisfaction and social status. This patriarchal system defines the condition of childlessness as a mechanical failure of a property that is deemed unproductive. It is viewed as a material loss that devalues the self-esteem and ego of the patriarchal male.

The logical consequence of these reproductive rules forces the wives to comply with Baba Segi's demands and avoid physical confrontation or open rebellion, which risks triggering expulsion. Instead, the wives choose to cope with this oppressive patriarchal system by utilizing interpersonal strategies to maintain their "security" within the household. According to Kandiyoti (1988, p. 280), "They [women] would rather adopt interpersonal strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband."

This quotation becomes the basis for understanding how the wives in Baba Segi's house utilize the path of pregnancy as a primary strategy to win the heart and control the attention of their husband. In this system, a wife who successfully gives birth to a child instantly gains a respected position within the house, as depicted through the character of Iya Femi: "Iya Femi, the new wife, soon gave birth to a son and there was much celebration.

The new mother clapped her knees together when she sat and strutted about like her womb was a gold mine." (Shoneyin, p. 64). The phrase "womb was a gold mine" illustrates how the patriarchal system in the household operates. The rules established by Baba Segi place children as the most vital and valuable asset, so the wives consciously utilize pregnancy as a bargaining tool to secure their positions and guarantee their livelihood within the household.

Patriarchal control in this household also operates symbolically through the standardization of the wives' social identities using the title "Iya" (which means "Mother" in Yoruba culture). Through the narrative, Shoneyin clearly demonstrates how Baba Segi addresses his wives by emphasizing this title: "...he greeted them: Iya Segi. Iya Tope. Iya Femi. Bolanle." Each woman curtsied, proud to be defined by her firstborn child, except Bolanle, who was iya to none." (Shoneyin, p. 12). This quotation serves as clear evidence of how the "rules of the game" in the household work by erasing a woman's personal identity and replacing it with her reproductive function.

The original names of the senior wives are intentionally dissolved and replaced by their status as mothers of their firstborn children. The wives even feel proud to be identified based on their children ("proud to be defined by her firstborn child") because the title signifies a high social status. This phenomenon of identity shifting due to children perfectly aligns with Kandiyoti's (1988, p. 279) argument that within a rigid patriarchal system, "Sons are a woman's most critical resource." Sons are considered the greatest asset for women because it is through their presence that a wife can secure her status, honorable title, and protection from her husband.

In contrast, a painful discrepancy is visible in the phrase "except Bolanle, who was iya to none." Bolanle is separated from the group of wives and is still called by her original name because she has not yet succeeded in providing offspring, which leaves her deemed as not having "earned" that sacred naming right.

A very sharp contrast regarding these rules of the game can also be observed in the differing fates of Iya Femi and the fourth wife, Bolanle. While the other wives can walk with pride because they feel they have fulfilled Baba Segi's rules and desires, Bolanle receives the exact opposite treatment due to her inability to provide offspring. In this household, a wife who does not yet have children loses her significance, is considered worthless, and is stripped of her right to speak. This unequal treatment toward Bolanle is directly demonstrated by Baba Segi, who controls the physical movement of the wives:

"...his wives (except Bolanle, who hadn't earned her right to an armchair) kept their seats at the angle their husband insisted on." (Shoneyin, p. 14).

This quote shows how Baba Segi exercises absolute power, even down to regulating the specific angle of his wives' armchairs. This act is a symbol that basic rights and physical comfort within the house are not given freely, but must be "paid for" through reproductive functions. Baba Segi punishes Bolanle, who has not yet given him a child, by denying her the space or the right to sit in the same comfortable chairs as the other wives.

Not only does he control them through physical space, but Baba Segi's oppression also manifests as verbal abuse when Bolanle expresses doubt about visiting a herbalist to check for abnormalities in her womb: "Listen to yourself!" he shouted. "Does your blood not boil when you see other women carrying babies on their backs? Do tears not fill your eyes when you see mothers suckling infants? You of all people should be willing to try everything! Offspring make our visit to this world complete! Do you want to remain a barren maggot?" (Shoneyin, p. 36).

Through this verbal violence, Baba Segi demonstrates how he forces his patriarchal standards onto his wife. The phrase "Offspring make our visit to this world complete!" reinforces the patriarchal view that a woman's sole purpose in life is reproduction; without children, a woman's existence is deemed incomplete. This verbal oppression reaches its peak when Baba Segi insults Bolanle by calling her a "barren maggot." The use of the word "maggot" is deeply degrading, as it equates a woman who cannot have children with a disgusting and useless parasitic organism. Through this narrative, Baba Segi asserts that a non-reproductive wife is merely a burden consuming his resources.

3.2 The Women Patriarchal Bargaining Strategies

3.2.1 Reproductive Strategy

The construction of oppression within Baba Segi's household, which positions the female womb as an absolute reproductive commodity, logically opens a new bargaining space for the wives. Through the theory of Patriarchal Bargaining, Deniz Kandiyoti asserts that rigid oppression within a patriarchal system does not necessarily paralyze women's mobility. Kandiyoti explicitly states that patriarchal rules: "...also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression." (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 275).

This quote emphasizes that women within a patriarchal system are never purely helpless, passive victims. Instead, they possess the potential to launch resistance, whether active or passive, the specific form of which is tailored to the male-made "rules of the game" in order to secure their own interests and survival spaces. In this household, the rules mandate that every wife must provide offspring to be acknowledged. When the three senior wives—Iya Segi, Iya Tope, and Iya Femi—realize that Baba Segi is actually infertile, they do not choose open confrontation, which would risk losing their status in the household. Instead, they exploit the rules of the game by executing a Reproductive Manipulation Strategy.

This strategy is carried out by performing obedience in the domestic sphere as a mask to conceal the biological sabotage they commit behind their husband's back. This performative obedience is first constructed through highly theatrical domestic rituals designed to pamper Baba Segi's male ego. This tactic ensures that the husband remains deluded into thinking he is the sole ruler, as illustrated through the homecoming scene: "The entire household poured out of different rooms to welcome their benefactor. Baba Segi's three sons lay prostrate... The daughters knelt before him... Each woman curtsied, proud to be defined by her firstborn child... Iya Segi's deft fingers [prised off his agbada]." (Shoneyin, p. 12).

The use of the word "benefactor" in this quote reveals the material-based rationality underlying the wives' obedience. They are acutely aware that women's access to economic resources is tightly locked by the patriarchal system and can only be negotiated by satisfying the male figure. By displaying excessive physical submission (prostrating, kneeling, curtsying), the wives turn their bodies into bargaining capital.

This performative compliance is further reinforced through a manipulative communication structure consisting of mutual flattery:

"Iya Segi, wife of my youth. Would I have breathed if I had not married you?" Iya Segi paused and turned to him. "May your breath be long, my lord. Where would I be if not for you?" (Shoneyin, p. 13).

The term "my lord" spoken by Iya Segi is not a form of genuine submission, but rather a political verbal instrument to feed the husband's arrogance so that he remains unsuspecting. Through this psychological exchange, Baba Segi receives what he craves: the illusion of absolute authority, validation of his masculinity and fertility, and flawless physical service. However, in return for this false obedience, the senior wives successfully secure massive material benefits and stable social security.

When faced with the reality that an empty womb would destroy their position, the three senior wives coldly take control of their own bodily functions. They secretly get pregnant by other men and label these children as Baba Segi's legitimate offspring. A radical confession regarding this is clearly delivered by Iya Segi:

"I know the reason why Bolanle has not conceived," she continued, "and it is not one that a thousand doctors can cure... If my husband did not have seed, then what harm could it do to seek it elsewhere? So, I found seed and planted it in my belly." (Shoneyin, p. 150).

The conscious act of seeking "seed" elsewhere ("seek it elsewhere") demonstrates a total deconstruction of patriarchal morality. Iya Segi redefines her body not as her husband's property, but as an independent tool of production whose decision-making power belongs entirely to the woman. This reproductive manipulation strategy does not operate individually; rather, it is institutionalized collectively as a subversive solidarity among the three wives to preserve their group's economic survival, as acknowledged by Iya Femi: "One night when Baba Segi was busy pummeling Iya Tope, Iya Segi came to my room and told me how children were born in Baba Segi's household. She said it as if the solution wasn't out of choice but necessity. When she left my room, I smiled to myself. I was already pregnant." (Shoneyin, p. 93).

The phrase "not out of choice but necessity" confirms that for the wives, faking offspring is the only rational choice to hack an oppressive system that offers them no other options. This phenomenon perfectly highlights Kandiyoti's (1988, p. 280) argument regarding the interpersonal dynamics of women in rigid patriarchal systems, which states: "They would rather adopt interpersonal strategies that maximize their security through manipulation of the affections of their sons and husband." According to Kandiyoti's theory, Baba Segi gains public social status as a fertile man, while the three wives successfully convert this delusion into safe spaces, financial support, and a good social standing through the title "Iya."

This strategy succeeds because the wives exploit the psychological blind spot of the egocentric patriarchal male, which highlights the naivety of the male ego that is cynically criticized by Iya Tope: "Men are like that. They think they sit in the center and the world turns around them." (Shoneyin, p. 55). Knowing that Baba Segi is trapped in a narcissistic delusion that the world revolves around him, the wives allow him to remain in this fantasy of power. In reality, Baba Segi, who genuinely believes he is the sole oppressor, has been reduced to a mere "financial instrument" steered from behind by his wives' strategic reproduction.

3.2.2 Intellectual Strategy

As the only wife in Baba Segi's household with a higher education degree, Bolanle adopts a patriarchal bargaining modality that differs significantly from the other three wives. Bolanle exploits the system's loopholes through an Intellectual Resistance Strategy. Through this strategy, her intellectual capacity acts as a subversive instrument that hacks the system. Kandiyoti explains that a rigid patriarchal system operates through binding bargaining mechanisms: "...patriarchal bargains that act as implicit scripts that define, limit, and inflect their market and domestic options." (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 285).

Within the structure of Baba Segi's household, the implicit scripts created by patriarchy dictate a heavily biased doctrine: a woman's womb is the sole indicator of reproductive success, and if failure occurs (infertility), the woman is entirely to blame, flawed, and fit to be discarded. This male-authored script limits the domestic options of the women in the house; consequently, the three senior wives are forced to adapt to this rigid script because they possess no other modalities to defend themselves before patriarchal law; they must fake pregnancies to avoid the social punishments of the oppressive system.

However, Bolanle's background as a university graduate changes the entire direction of the game. Education provides Bolanle with a critical mindset that allows her to refuse to define herself through this rigid patriarchal script. From the beginning, Bolanle's intellectual status is perceived as a dangerous threat capable of disrupting the stability of patriarchal power in the environment, as reflected in the anxiety of Baba Segi's friends:

"Who would dare to drag a graduate? When she opens her mouth and English begins to pour from it like heated palm oil, the constable will be so captivated, he will throw our friend behind bars!" (Shoneyin, p. 10).

The sarcasm regarding Bolanle's English skills ("English begins to pour... like heated palm oil") reveals a deep-seated fear within the traditional patriarchal system toward educated women. The male power structure realizes that highly literate women who understand modern institutions cannot be controlled using old scripts of oppression.

This critical mindset triggers Bolanle's open resistance against the irrational methods forced upon her by Baba Segi. When her husband pressures her to consume traditional potions and visit herbalists, Bolanle rejects these options. She fights back against the traditional control mechanisms typically used by patriarchy to dominate women's bodies. Bolanle's rational firmness is captured in Baba Segi's frustrated complaint:

"Every time I have suggested that we consult herbalists and prophets, you have called them con men and rubbished their powers. Well... I have thought long and hard about it, and I think we should go to the hospital to talk to a doctor." (Shoneyin, p. 16).

Critically, this quote proves the power of intellectual resistance in refusing a husband's dominance. Through logical thinking, Bolanle successfully convinces her husband that the herbalists are merely frauds ("con men"). This causes Baba Segi to lose his faith in traditional healing without requiring any physical conflict between them. This forces the husband to step out of the comfort zone of traditional rules and comply with the rational decision to seek a hospital examination.

The peak of Bolanle's medical resistance occurs at the University College Hospital (UCH). Within this modern institution, Baba Segi's usually absolute male dominance is paralyzed because the traditional patriarchal system holds no

authority in the face of education. Here, Bolanle takes control and consciously asserts her agency: "We are here to seek medical advice." (Shoneyin, p. 28). When Baba Segi attempts to restore his crumbling authority through verbal aggression by accusing Bolanle of being barren, the modern medical institution acts as a shield protecting women's reproductive rights.

The doctor firmly positions Baba Segi as a mere spectator who has no voice over Bolanle's body: "Mr. Alao, I am conducting a medical investigation on my patient. The only reason you are allowed to be here is that she has permitted it." (Shoneyin, p. 31). The phrase "is that she has permitted it" marks a profound reversal of the power hierarchy before patriarchal law. In the domestic sphere, Baba Segi claims absolute ownership over his wives' bodies; however, in the hospital, under the supremacy of modern science, Baba Segi's authority is reduced to an object whose presence in the room is governed by his wife's permission.

Through Kandiyoti's lens, the open resistance chosen by Bolanle demands a heavy sociological price due to the rigid walls of patriarchy. When a woman refuses to comply with traditional bargaining scripts (implicit scripts), the patriarchal system isolates her to prevent her from disrupting the existing order. The fear of this patriarchal script collapsing also traps the senior wives; they worry that Bolanle's literate status will displace them: "She thinks we are beneath her. She wants our husband to cast us aside as 'the illiterate ones,'..." (Shoneyin, p. 41).

This quote should be read critically, not as personal hatred between women, but as evidence of how cruelly the patriarchal system pits its oppressed subjects against one another. The rigid patriarchal system creates a condition of scarcity, where the affection and economic security of the sole male ruler must be fought over. Consequently, to maintain survival under an oppressive script, the domestic environment turns into a battlefield that tortures Bolanle mentally through mystical terror.

The arrogant nature of the patriarchal male is exploited by the senior wives for their collective economic benefit. However, unlike the senior wives who intentionally leave Baba Segi trapped in this fantasy to secure their survival space and status through the title "Iya," Bolanle becomes the primary agent who shatters this delusion empirically.

This power reversal culminates when medical science confirms the intellectual truth defended by Bolanle. The laboratory results, which empirically state that Baba Segi is infertile, do not merely clear Bolanle's name from the stigma of barrenness, but collapse the entire script of lies that has sustained the household.

This truth, which crushes male authority, is only realized by Baba Segi at the end of the novel: "May the dogs eat your mouth!" Baba Segi towered over Iya Segi. "What mouth do you have to tell me how to do anything? You, who have brought bastard children into my home! You have used me! Wounded me!" (Shoneyin, p. 162).

Baba Segi's frustrated exclamation, "You have used me! Wounded me!", serves as the most authentic evidence of the destruction of the patriarchal script (implicit scripts). For decades, the foundation of power in this house was nothing more than a fragile theatrical stage.

The intellectual and medical resistance carried out by Bolanle successfully shatters the biased patriarchal script into pieces through the power of objective scientific facts, while simultaneously liberating the female body from unjust historical blame. Bolanle's strategy proves that intellectual capacity gives women the power to independently redefine (inflect) their domestic options. Within the system, Bolanle's resistance exposes the greatest weakness of patriarchy: objective facts that cannot be disputed by the male ego.

4. Conclusion

This research concludes that the patriarchal system in Baba Segi's household operates through complex, multi-directional bargaining mechanisms. The wives are strategic actors whose choices are dictated by their respective social modalities. The three uneducated senior wives execute a Reproductive Manipulation Strategy, gaining a fragile domestic security through performative compliance and secret biological subversion, albeit at a heavy emotional cost.

Conversely, Bolanle deploys an Intellectual Resistance Strategy, using her higher education to shift the conflict to a medical institution. By introducing empirical facts, she shatters the patriarchal delusion and reclaims her autonomy. Ultimately, this study reveals that while patriarchy imposes severe structural constraints, women will systematically leverage their specific resources—whether interpersonal deceit or intellectual capacity—to challenge and disrupt masculine dominance.

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